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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000259

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [INR](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE CHAIR WELCOMES AND
WOOS AMBASSADOR

REF: A. 06 MINSK 1316

[1](#)B. MINSK 206

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Ambassador on March 19 met with the Chair of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences (BNAS) Myasnikovich. The BNAS chair briefly criticized U.S. "isolationist" policies towards Belarus, but generally spoke about the need to increase U.S.-Belarusian bilateral cooperation in science. Myasnikovich assured Ambassador that current USG physical protection and spent nuclear fuel projects at the Sosniy research facility would not face GOB obstacles. He also sought U.S. participation in Belarus' nuclear power plant construction. Ambassador agreed to maintain Embassy contact with the BNAS but stressed that the current political situation in Belarus prevented more substantive cooperation. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On March 19, Ambassador paid a courtesy call to the Chairman of the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences (BNAS) Mikhail Myasnikovich. Director of the BNAS international relations department Vladimir Podkopayev, DCM, Pol/Econ Chief, and Poloff attended the meeting. Myasnikovich thanked Ambassador for taking the initiative to meet with him, mentioning that he previously had periodic contact with former U.S. ambassadors to Belarus and would like to maintain such a relationship with the Embassy.

Why Not Greater Cooperation?

[1](#)3. (C) Myasnikovich cited his previous trips to many U.S. universities to develop scientific research partnerships for the BNAS. However, such partnerships needed greater state support in order to materialize. Myasnikovich suggested the U.S. and Belarus governments develop a bilateral relationship: "science is not politics." Ambassador explained to Myasnikovich that the current political situation in Belarus prevented any substantive cooperation at senior levels.

No Obstacles to USG-GOB Cooperation At Sosniy

[1](#)4. (C) Myasnikovich reported that the BNAS has approximately 12 joint projects with EU countries, primarily France and Germany, and three information technology projects with NATO. As a member of the International Science and Technology Center (ISTC), the BNAS chair noted that his institution also

has opportunities to work with the U.S. Myasnikovich mentioned that the U.S. had rejected "several" BNAS project proposals to the ISTC, but Ambassador pointed out the ISTC-backed U.S. Department of Energy physical protection and spent nuclear fuel transfer projects at the Belarusian nuclear research institute Sosniy (ref A). Stressing the importance the USG placed on both projects, Ambassador hoped that no obstacles would stall completion. Myasnikovich, noting that there existed internal bureaucratic problems that needed to be solved, assured Ambassador that the projects would be completed.

West Should Understand "Belarusian Mentality"

15. (C) When Ambassador noted that the USG's fundamental objective in Belarus remains democratic reform, Myasnikovich claimed not to understand why the West continued its "isolationist policies" against Belarus if the Cold War was over. He suggested the West first learn and understand Belarusians' patience, tolerance, and non-aggressive nature and then apply this knowledge when forming policies towards Belarus. He criticized the U.S. and EU visa bans against GOB officials, stressing that the West should focus on strengthening contact with all Belarusians, including officials. Ambassador agreed that building ties with Belarusians, including with scientists, is essential, but reminded Myasnikovich that the core of U.S. values and interests is genuine democracy and the USG will continue to press the regime to implement democratic reform. Trying to change subjects, Myasnikovich called politics a topic for a small circle and noted that the majority of Belarusians had a positive view of the U.S.

A Nuclear Power Plant Is A Reality

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16. (C) Ambassador thanked Myasnikovich for allowing his deputy, Vladimir Timoshpolskiy, to attend an Embassy-sponsored roundtable discussion on the possible construction of a nuclear power plant (NPP)(ref B). Myasnikovich explained that an NPP was a "serious topic" for Belarus. Soon the GOB would announce a tender for construction and invite U.S. companies to participate in at least part of the project. However, according to the BNAS chair, the GOB was "surprised" by the reliability of Russia's new generation of nuclear reactors and predicted that Belarus would do business primarily with Russia.

17. (C) Myasnikovich noted that the International Atomic Energy Agency was scheduled to arrive in Belarus on March 22 to help the GOB realize what protocols and procedures needed to be implemented for the safe realization of an NPP. The biggest battle for the GOB would be mitigating the post-Chernobyl syndrome among the population, which was more a mental handicap than physical. When asked about Belarusians fears of another Chernobyl disaster, Myasnikovich agreed that the GOB needed to convince its citizens that the NPP will be safe and secure and admitted that his government has yet to launch a public awareness campaign. The best method, according to Myasnikovich, was to give Belarusians as much information as possible, because the more they know, the more they will support the project.

Comment

18. (C) Myasnikovich's relatively warm welcome of Ambassador, along with allowing his deputy Timoshpolskiy to attend the NPP roundtable, shows the BNAS' level of interest in establishing greater contact with the U.S. Myasnikovich is the only senior GOB official to build on the otherwise empty rhetoric of Lukashenko to strengthen dialogue with the West, although he showed no signs that he was a reformer inside the

regime. Ambassador agreed with the need to increase contact at the working levels, but she made sure the BNAS Chair had no illusions of more senior cooperation between Belarus and the U.S. until Belarus achieved democratic reforms.
Stewart